



THE INQUIRER

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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians



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THE INQUIRER

The Unitarian and Free Christian Paper

Established in 1842, The Inquirer is the oldest nonconformist religious newspaper.

'To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.'

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Editor: M Colleen Burns MA
46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF **T:** 01603 505281
E: inquirer@btinternet.com
Proofreader: Sarah Reynolds
Cover photo: Tim Hensel

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Write to: Steven Bisby
71 Earlesmere Avenue, Balby, Doncaster,
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E: admin@inquirer.org.uk

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Find out more about Unitarians
The General Assembly, Essex Hall
1-6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY
T: 0207 2402384
E: info@unitarian.org.uk

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Inquiring Words...

In the Rising Sun Today

We all know loss and pain.

Let none of it divide us.

In the rising sun today

Let us do together what we cannot do alone:

Roll away the stones that close our hearts.

The Rev Joel Miller

Lots of new beginnings

Welcome to this exciting issue of *The Inquirer*.

The Unitarian General Assembly's new chief officer has given us a marvellous interview. While aware of the challenges facing our movement, Elizabeth Slade believes we will grow, that we can attract people who have made a journey like hers. She says of joining a Unitarian congregation in 2012: 'As I got more involved, I got to learn what it meant to belong to a loving, supportive community – something I didn't know I was missing.'

Elizabeth said she would not have applied to become chief officer if she didn't believe in the Unitarian movement's potential. So she is taking a leap of faith.

There's another leap – the redesign of *The Inquirer*. The Inquirer Board sought a more modern look – and the result here. The board and I are grateful to The Hibbert Trust for its contribution towards the redesign expense. We hope our readers find it an improvement – and that it will attract a few more.

One more important bit of news in this week's issue: on page 5 the Inquirer Board is launching an appeal. It's not the first time. Indeed, even when the Unitarian movement was at its height, it has always relied on donations. Postage and printing costs are rising. Please consider the appeal. I very much hope not to be the last editor of this venerable publication.

The timing may look awkward as the board seeks donations at the same time as the redesign. But the project started two years ago. (Some of you may recall the page plans we unveiled at the 2017 Annual Meetings.) And, it was substantially underwritten by The Hibbert Trust.

MC Burns

A Unitarian since 2012 when she discovered a church where she felt she belonged, Elizabeth Slade steps into the denomination's top job.

I believe in the potential for growth

Elizabeth Slade, 39, started working alongside Unitarian Chief Officer Derek McAuley at Unitarian Headquarters in March. She has travelled the country, meeting with Unitarian groups, and will take up her post as chief officer of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement following the General Assembly meetings. Here she talks about what inspired her to take the job and the opportunities she sees ahead.

Q How long have you been a Unitarian?

I first stepped through the doors of a Unitarian church in 2012 – with much trepidation! I grew up in a Christian family (my grandparents met working in a missionary hospital in India, and my grandmother went on to be a Methodist lay preacher), attending the village church and Sunday school where I grew up in Dorset, but I stopped paying attention as a teenager, and didn't give religion much of a second thought after that. So it felt strange to suddenly discover a church where I felt that I could belong, and the more I got to know about Unitarianism, the more I saw that it fitted my values and worldview.

Q What drew you to Unitarianism?

I saw that Andy Pakula, the minister at (New Unity) the Unitarian congregation that met down the road from my flat, had a background in science and business, as did I, and was an atheist – and so it signalled to me very clearly that this was a very different congregation to the ideas of religion I had grown up with. At the start, I appreciated having a new space in my life in which to reflect, and to have my ideas challenged by Andy's brilliant 'sermons'. As I got more involved, I got to learn what it meant to belong to a loving, supportive community – something I didn't know I was missing.

Q Why did you apply to become Chief Officer?

For the last few years, I have committed more and more of my attention towards the need for our culture to better support the fullness of what it means to be human. So much of our culture pushes us towards being individualistic consumers, rather than allowing us to truly thrive, and I see that what's missing is the wisdom, community and connection that have traditionally belonged to religions.

"I want to be part of revitalising our culture's spiritual life – and it's very clear to me that the Unitarian movement has just the right DNA to play a leading role in this."

As church attendance has dropped drastically in the past decades, we seem to have thrown the babies out with the bathwater, and we see the impact of this spiritual deficit in so many of the challenges around us – divisions in society, loneliness, mental-health problems, people feeling a lack of meaning and purpose in their lives. And so I want to be part of revitalising our culture's spiritual life – and it's very clear to me that the Unitarian movement has just the right DNA to play a leading role in this.

Q What is your experience most relevant to this post – what do you believe will be helpful in leading the Unitarian movement?

I spent a couple of years as Chief Operating Officer of Sunday Assembly (SA) – a global network of secular congregations that was founded in London in 2013 by two stand-up comedians, with the ethos 'Live Better, Help Often, Wonder More'.

I learnt how hard it is to run a church-like organisation without several centuries of experience, ministry training schools or physical buildings – and also how extraordinary it is to work alongside an army of volunteers who give blood, sweat and tears to create and sustain welcoming communities.

I was also a Trustee at New Unity for several years, including the period where we merged our two churches into one Charitable Incorporated Organisation. So I've experienced the gritty insides of what it takes to keep a congregation running.

My career in the healthcare industry gave me lots of experience in operational management, strategic planning, marketing, finance, people management, organisational development, etc. And I'm starting to see parallels with how the NHS is one family yet with a multitude of expressions across the country.

Continued on page 4 >



Zabeth Slade (centre) met with Scottish Unitarians in Edinburgh. Photo by Sue Good

< Continued from page 3

What did you learn while working at SA? Do you see parallels between the General Assembly and the SA?

I learnt that there is a huge appetite for belonging to a congregation, particularly one that won't give you a set of rules to follow. Two hundred people showed up to the first Sunday Assembly in January 2013, 300 to the second, and now 400 people meet regularly at Sunday Assembly London, and there are dozens of Sunday Assembly chapters around the world.

The way it was presented made it accessible, appealing and relevant, and it told its story well to the outside world. Although it was sometimes promoted as an 'atheist church', an important part of its ethos was that everyone was welcome, and religious people also took part. I see similarities with Unitarianism in the way that all are welcome, and there is space for a wide variety of world-views, while expressing common values.

It was always a task to make sure Sunday Assembly HQ was providing the right balance of listening, support, and leadership to the local chapters, and I can sense that this is important for the GA too. There is huge experience and expertise across the whole movement, and I hope that I can bring what I learnt at Sunday Assembly about communication between communities to this role.

What are the biggest challenges facing Unitarians?

Just as church attendance has dropped across the board in the past decades, most Unitarian congregations are much smaller than they used to be. I see a huge hunger for what our congregations can provide, but we need to make sure that we're telling our story in a way that it is heard. The millennial generation are much more open to spirituality than recent generations, and Unitarian values chime well with theirs – openness, equality, living meaningful lives. It's essential we keep showing how we are relevant. I know that in many congregations, falling attendance means that there are the same few people doing a lot of the work of supporting the community, and it can be easy to run out of steam. And the huge asset of most congregations having beautiful, historic buildings to meet in comes with a downside too of course, of keeping them in good repair. One of the big barriers to engaging with new people is the language – a lot of religious language has a lot of baggage for people. (I know

"I see a huge hunger for what our congregations can provide, but we need to make sure that we're telling our story in a way that it is heard."

I struggled with even the word 'church' when I started attending.) And I'm interested in how we can talk about the core of what we've been doing for hundreds of years in language that resonates today.

Do you believe in the movement's potential for growth?

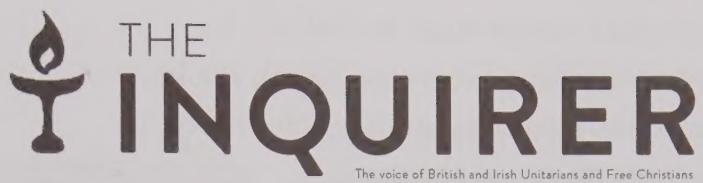
I wouldn't be here if I didn't! Absolutely. I see that what the Unitarian movement has got is gold-dust – a faith with deep radical roots, that welcomes all, that encompasses a genuine breadth of spiritual paths (including for people who don't like the term 'spiritual path'!), and walks the talk on social justice. And it's needed more than ever – our society is suffering in many ways because of religions not keeping pace with what people are looking for. And, most critically, the changes ahead of us because of the effects of climate breakdown will absolutely need us all to draw on spiritual strength to navigate them, and our society is definitely not match-fit on that front. It seems that Unitarianism has always adapted to meet the needs of a changing culture, and that is especially important now.

Unitarians and in particular Chief Officer Derek McAuley were involved in the movement for Equal Marriage. Are there issues in which you hope Unitarians will be active?

The role that Derek and others played in securing Equal Marriage was a brilliant example of how as a movement we can achieve great things together, and I think it's important that we build on this milestone by helping all congregations be actively welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community. While so many other religious organisations refuse to conduct same-sex weddings, it feels like we have a responsibility to show that all are welcome, and I'd love to see many more same-sex weddings in our chapels.

As for current issues, I think it's important that congregations feel supported in their local social action, and that we shine a light on the excellent work done by congregations in their own areas. At the national level, it is important for us to show that living meaningfully, or living a spiritual life, is not just a 'nice to have' or a niche interest, but a fundamental part of human flourishing, and making a case for this – reflecting the fact that most of the population currently pay little attention to spiritual matters. I think we have a responsibility to show that there is an alternative to the individualistic, consumerist mainstream way of living that clearly isn't serving people or the planet.

The Inquirer Board seeks support to continue publication.



An appeal to our readers

Throughout its 177-year history, *The Inquirer* has enriched Unitarian and Free Christian lives. It connects Unitarians – shortens the miles between the like-minded and creates bridges among disparate Unitarian beliefs. Sometimes its columns provide a place to rage at injustice, at closed-mindedness, at moneychangers. Or held within its paragraphs, there is comfort, wisdom – from ministers, leaders, congregants, who share their life experiences, their erudition, their beliefs. And, when we're lucky, there is laughter – or the quiet smile that comes with recognition of our Unitarian foibles. It reminds Unitarians and Free Christians what we have in common. The Inquirer promotes our movement, our values, our way of being in the world. It is faith made tangible – a touchable, shareable thing that can be pressed into a visitor's hands, passed around a discussion circle, taken and read anywhere. Every fortnight it is a presence, a constant.

Another constant, since The Inquirer's establishment as a charity in 1842, is that its costs have never been met by subscriptions alone. The generosity of individual Unitarians and organisations is the lifeblood of *The Inquirer*. And, for that, the Inquirer Board is grateful. Because without those contributions, the paper simply would not exist.

Many denominational newspapers have shrunk, reduced their publishing schedules or disappeared entirely. The culling of newspapers across every type of journalism shows how vulnerable even well-established papers can be. They, too, were thought of as constants by their readers.

Postage goes up. Paper costs more, ink too. Skilled editors and proof-readers must also be paid.

We are proud to be a print publication and we intend to continue in this vein. We have watched as other church publications have gone online only to wither and then cease to exist. We took advice from a digital journalism PhD – who emphatically recommended we stay in print. *The Inquirer* is committed to remaining a constant within the Unitarian movement – but without more financial support, *The Inquirer* could be lost.

So, the Inquirer Board is announcing an appeal to help ensure the continued publication of *The Inquirer*. We are asking that districts, congregations, trusts and other funding bodies look at your grants and see if there is a way to contribute a bit more. Many donation amounts have remained static for more than a decade.

We also want to let individuals know how much we appreciate it when they 'top up' their subscription payment with a bit more to defray expenses. If you are not a subscriber, please consider becoming one. After several years of decline, our subscriptions are increasing again. It means we are doing something right. We hope to continue the momentum.

Content-wise, this is an exciting time for *The Inquirer* – a Unitarian and Free Christian voice in the midst of times that need to hear it. Please consider giving what you can to ensure it will continue.

Send a cheque to our administrator Steven Bisby, 71 Earlesmere Avenue, Balby, Doncaster, DN4 0QD. Or contact him on admin@inquirer.org.uk for information on electronic donations. (Please let us know if you are eligible for Gift Aid.) For information on *The Inquirer*'s finances see our page on the Charities Commission website: <https://bit.ly/2BXU5o2>

If you have any questions on finances please contact Board Chair Phil Tomlin: the.tomlins@live.co.uk

Thank you for reading *The Inquirer*, for supporting our shared mission. Please now help us so that it may continue.

The Inquirer Board: Diane Bennett, Stephanie Bisby, Angela Maher, John Midgley, Feargus O'Connor, Phil Tomlin and Valerie Walker

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Wood Green Trust, London

Yorkshire Union

Amidst horrors such as Belsen, we wonder where God was. Frank Walker says perhaps that unutterable mystery is present in our revulsion.

We long for goodness, for certainty

Frank Walker looks back on the times of his life and how the cruelties of World War II – which happened when he was just a boy – have stayed with him all these years. It has caused him to seek God, seek goodness ever since holding ‘let the more loving one be me’.

Most people have a special time, a particularly significant period in their lives that resonates with them throughout their whole life. My own special time (and I am hardly alone in this) is 1945, a year of immense significance. There was VE Day in May, the end of the war in Europe. I was 10. I lay in bed listening to the sound of the church bells – the first time they had been rung for years. Then came the first-ever 11-plus examination. I was amongst the first to sit this new exam, the fruit of the 1944 Education Act. I passed and was awarded a free place at the local grammar school.

School changed everything

This changed my life completely and made it possible for me to go on eventually to university, something which no one else in my family had ever done.

Then came the end of the war with Japan, signalled by the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We could hardly believe that one or two bombs could completely destroy a great city and kill hundreds of thousands. It was a time of hope and expectation but also a time of the utmost foreboding.

In the late summer and autumn we began to see newsreel films about the horrors of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps, beginning with devastating scenes from Belsen, one of the earliest camps to be liberated. We were stunned at the sight of countless bodies shovelled into mass graves, a most macabre waste disposal operation, by the tales of torture and mass murder of the innocent.

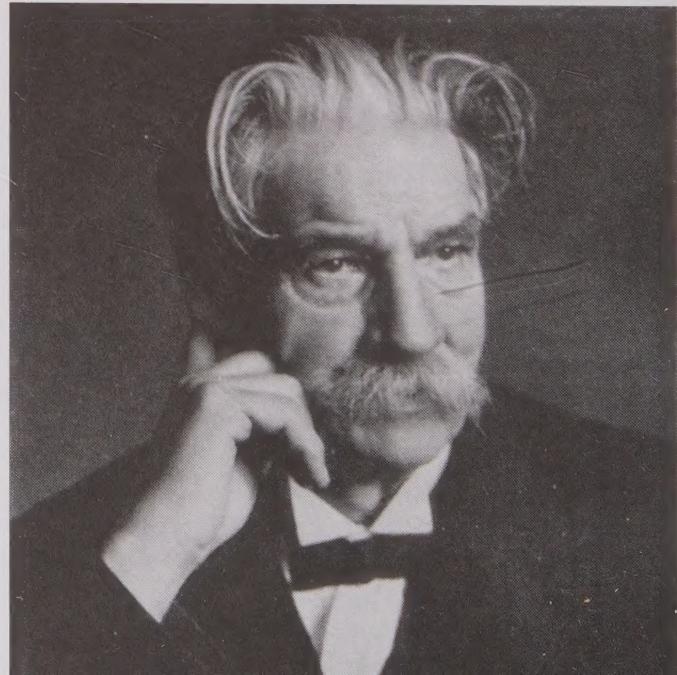
“We were forced to see that people were capable of committing the most barbaric atrocities on their fellow humans.”

Facing up to barbarity

We were forced to see that people were capable of committing the most barbaric atrocities on their fellow humans. It was difficult to take in, impossible to understand all the implications. These events have dominated my thinking ever since.

What was so sinister about Hitler’s Final Solution was that it didn’t arise out of a sudden blaze of uncontrollable anger. No, it was coldly calculated down to the last detail. But what do we feel about seeing these pictures of Belsen and Auschwitz?

We had never seen anything like that. We had not thought it possible. We were



Albert Schweitzer in his 1952 Nobel Prize portrait



Survivors distribute food at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. Photo by Army Photographic Unit 5 via Commons

“What was so sinister about Hitler’s Final Solution was that it didn’t arise out of a sudden blaze of uncontrollable anger. No, it was coldly calculated down to the last detail.”

stunned. This was an attack on all that was sacred, a repudiation of all that was holy. It was unimaginable – but it happened. Worse than a nightmare – it was all too real.

God as ethical will

We reel back from it sickened, contaminated, stifled. How we long for goodness, just ordinary goodness, sheer, simple decency. Albert Schweitzer said that within himself he experienced God as ethical will. What does that mean? How can God possibly be present in Belsen? God is that of which nothing higher can be conceived, said St Anselm. ‘God’ is the name we give to the unutterable mystery that we confront, not as the explanation, but as the name we can give to the mystery, the name that helps us to come to terms with it.

In all honesty we have to admit that the extent of our human ignorance seems without limit; in contrast, what we know or can know is small and limited. Therefore, certainty is elusive. Even so, what we expect in science or long for in religion and morality is certainty. Yet of one thing I believe we can be sure: the revulsion we feel at the sight of Belsen. That is a sure and certain revelation of the profoundest human reality. It is the light in which we must assess and order all things. Tragically, though, this can be ignored or repudiated by our human propensity for evil (which is yet another certain reality). Wherever the balance tilts against goodness, society collapses.

People can defeat goodness

Could it be that ‘God’ is present in our repudiation, our instinctive repudiation of Belsen and the death camps? In the suffocating atmosphere of the gas ovens we long for the clean fresh air of goodness. In that longing, somewhere and somehow is God – but sadly, not all powerful. People can defeat and dismiss goodness. People planned and carried out the holocaust. And it wasn’t just Hitler and the Nazis. Hitler held power for only 12 years. Josef Stalin held power for four decades and produced the Gulag Archipelago of Russian death camps. How many died? Sixty million? Then there are Pol Pot in Cambodia, massacres in Rwanda and Bosnia, Mao Zedong in China. (Mao was worshipped as a living god. How many did he kill? Seventy-two million?) Such monsters seemed all powerful.

The universe creates, destroys

Is there that of which nothing higher can be conceived? Higher than the state power that contrives unimaginable evil? Certainly state power is not the highest that we can conceive: God becomes necessary in thought, it seems. Albert Schweitzer said, ‘We cannot understand what happens in the universe. What is glorious in it is united with what is full of horror. What is full of meaning is united to what is senseless. The spirit of the universe is at once creative and destructive – it creates while it destroys and destroys while it creates, and therefore it remains a riddle to us.’ At the same time Schweitzer gave us a beautiful image. There is the vast icy ocean of what seems indifferent to us. And yet through this there also flows the warm gulf stream of love. We let ourselves be seized and carried along by that vital stream.

I always think this excerpt of WH Auden’s poem ‘The More Loving One’ expresses our situation very wittily and wisely:

*Looking up at the stars, I know quite well
That, for all they care, I can go to hell,
But on earth indifference is the least
We have to dread from man or beast.*

*How should we like it were stars to burn
With a passion for us we could not return?
If equal affection cannot be,
Let the more loving one be me.*

Yes indeed, a moral that each of us may take to heart: *Let the more loving one be me!*



Frank Walker

The Rev Frank Walker is minister emeritus at Memorial Unitarian Church, Cambridge. Although retired from full-time ministry, he continues to write and preach.
Photo by David Steers

From nothing
to everything
by Danny Crosby



Danny Crosby floats in the Dead Sea

I believe in miracles

A trip to the Dead Sea convinces Danny Crosby not of miraculous truths in the Bible, but of the miracles that happen today in our own lives. We just have to watch out if we're in flip flops on the rocks.

I have a confession to make. Now please try not to be too shocked, but I have something to confess, which might trouble the most rational amongst you who read this column. I have to tell you this truth, that I didn't know I believed in, but I do. I believe in miracles.

Now don't get me wrong. I am not talking about the kind of miracles that are described in the Gospels, that are said to have taken place at Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee, possibly the most beautiful place on earth. No, I'm talking about every day miracles that seem to come to life as we struggle and resist and then we surrender and something new emerges.

There was one thing that I experienced in Israel – Palestine that I'm glad I did, but am not sure that I would like to repeat. It was floating in the Dead Sea, the lowest inland spot on earth. (It is something that none of us will be able to do at some point in the future as it is disappearing.) So, I'm glad I did it, but it was not a very pleasant experience.

That said, as I have reflected on it, it has revealed something to me.

I had a feeling I was not going to enjoy the experience as soon as I discovered I had to wear flip flops, something I do not like doing. Actually I'm not a great lover of beaches full stop. I love walking by the sea and staring out at it; but I do not like beaches very much.

Sue and I booked into a resort and took the trailer down to the Dead Sea. Everyone else there seemed to be from eastern Europe and were having a wonderful time. I took off my robe and began to walk out into the warm water. It was a windy day and the water was choppy. The ground beneath my feet was rocky. I struggled and stumbled in unfamiliar footwear that began to slide off my feet. I fell over a couple of times and cut my foot slightly on the rocks. Not something to do in salty water. I had been careful not to shave that morning as I was warned not to have exposed cuts.

I kept on stumbling and struggling – not at all enjoying the experience – and then I found myself up to my waist in warm salty water and I began to lay down, holding onto a post with one hand and one of the flip flops, that had fallen off, in the other. I let go of the post, I let go absolutely and let the salty water support me. Wow! What an amazing experience.

There I was floating on the water, moved around by the tide and the wind. I waved and laughed and just floated. It was lovely, if only for a few minutes. I eventually moved back to the post, struggled to put on the flip flop. I then struggled to my feet and stumbled back to shore. I did fall over again, but made it back without too much trouble. I then washed all the salty water away and let Sue have her turn. She had similar struggles, but not with the flip flops.

It was a new and perhaps magical experience, but not one I am desperate to repeat. Now you may ask where was the miracle? Well the miracle was in the fact that I was able to let go, to let the water support me and to experience floating. Like so many folk, I do not let go; I do not surrender easily to anything. I'm getting better at it.

Letting go is not easy. How often in life do we trust anyone or anything? How often do we trust life at all? How often do we feel we have to control everything and everyone just to get by? Do we trust life? Do we trust each other? Do we trust that the Creator Spirits deep embrace will hold us? Rarely, I suspect. The miracle comes, I have come to believe, whenever we act in faith, play our own part in life and not try to control everybody else's.

And when the sweet surrender comes, the same conclusion always follows. A voice somewhere in the core of my being gently speaks to me in a voice less than a whisper, but somehow more than silence. Just keep on doing what you are doing Danny, all is well. Just keep on doing what you are doing. It is not a voice I hear in my ears by the way but a deep knowing in the core of my being. So yes I believe in miracles. Why, you may well ask. Well, because I witness them every single day.

Innocent migrants
are held in terrible
conditions says
David Warhurst



Yarl's Wood Immigrant Detention Centre photo by Oliver White

End indefinite detention

Most people will be aware of the government's, so-called, 'hostile environment' towards immigrants. However, there has been much less attention given to the government's practice of detaining thousands of people indefinitely in immigration detention centres in the UK. Though these 'centres' are not technically prisons, you could be forgiven for thinking so – surrounded, as they are, by high walls, barbed wire and surveillance systems. Detainees have no freedom to leave. They have no release date. Unlike criminals, they are entirely innocent of any offence. Those held include pregnant women, survivors of rape, trafficking and sexual violence, people with learning difficulties and post-traumatic stress disorder, children, older people and survivors of torture. There is growing evidence of serious suffering and damage to mental health caused by indefinite detention.

Here are some facts (from The Migration Observatory website <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk>):

- ◊ The UK immigration detention estate is one of the largest in Europe.
- ◊ From 2009 to 2017, between 2,500 and 3,500 migrants have been in detention at any given time.
- ◊ In 2017 27,300 people entered immigration detention.
- ◊ Over one-fifth of detainees are held for two months.

◊ The most common category is people who have sought asylum in the UK.

Sir Stephen Shaw's July 2018 review of the detention of vulnerable people showed that there is still much work to be done. Sir Stephen, a former Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, argues that the time many people spend in detention remains 'deeply troubling'. He highlighted the 'unacceptable' conditions in which people are held, made worse by Home Office moves to increase capacity by adding extra beds to existing rooms.

The human rights organisation Liberty, to which the General Assembly is affiliated, is calling on the Government to stop detaining people in immigration removal centres without release dates. Liberty has promoted a petition calling on the Government to include a 28-day time limit on this form of detention in its Immigration Bill. The petition is supported by MPs from all parties, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, the BMA, the Bar Council, the National Preventative Mechanism (21 statutory bodies) and faith leaders including Unitarian Chief Officer Derek McAuley. It can be accessed and signed here: <https://bit.ly/2OZTGrs>

Regrettably, as drafted, the Immigration Bill could make things worse. Around 3 million EEA nationals, currently exempt under EU law, will become subject to UK rules. The bill also grants sweeping powers to the Home Secretary to make regulations modifying legislation.

Calling for more humane treatment is not 'going soft' on immigration. Clearly there must be procedures to identify those genuinely fleeing from persecution, and this can take time. However, there is no justification for subjecting those concerned to detention processes which deny their human rights, and subject them to deplorable conditions while they wait. Worse still there are a number of cases where long-term British residents, such as members of the Windrush generation, have been detained prior to deportation. The case of Irene Clelland, the subject of a GA resolution in 2017, springs to mind. More than 850 people were wrongfully held in immigration detention between 2012 and 2017. Is this part of the so-called 'hostile environment' for immigration we hear so much about?

Indefinite detention of immigrants is a stain on Britain's past reputation for compassionate treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. The UK is the only country in Europe that locks people up with no limit on how long they can be held. It's about time we stopped this brutal practice.

David Warhurst



David Warhurst writes here on behalf of the Unitarian General Assembly Penal and Social Affairs Panel. He is a member of the Stockton congregation.

Letters to the Editor



'Lest We Forget' what the Nightingale Centre means to the past and future

The Rev Peter B Godfrey, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire

To the Editor: The advertisement *Lest We Forget*, in *The Inquirer* and elsewhere, has been a timely reminder of part of the origin of the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. This was the Florence Nightingale Convalescent Home for Men.



Lest We Forget pointed out that the Home was erected as 'The National Memorial to the men of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches who fell in the war 1914-1918'.

I thought of this when reading some comments by children who had a holiday at the centre with the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund (SACH) and were asked afterwards by their teachers: 'What did you learn about yourself?' Some of the replies were: 'I learnt not to be

angry with other people' 'Some people didn't get on and now they are friends, which will make things better in school'

'Not all people are as bad as they seem' 'I thought some people might be annoying, but once you get to know them they're alright' 'Try to get along with other people.'

It is wonderful how the Nightingale Centre can be valuable in so many ways.

www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk
Photo left: A SACH group finishes a hike at Great Hucklow

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Offer GA subscription memberships

John Whitehead, London

To the Editor: Re Robert Ince's article about the controversy over Unitarian General Assembly Unitarian membership (*Inquirer*, 6 April)

May I suggest that we introduce a national 'subscribing membership' scheme for Unitarians who have no regular congregation. Perhaps there could also be acknowledged membership for those who subscribe to *The Inquirer* or who follow the faith tradition online.

Lots of detailed questions follow, but it's a thought.

The INQUIRER
The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7960 20 April 2019
New Zealand's response to racist terror

What's ours?

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Claire Macdonald reaches
“Beyond Congregation”

Enchanted Activism

I'm not sure who it was that said that a minister is part resident theologian and part community activist. I think it was Stephen Lingwood, Unitarian pioneer minister at Cardiff. And I think he's right, but I want to add that when you put them together, those terms add up to more than the sum of their parts. At best they add up to 'enchanted activism'. It's a term I lifted from Keith Hebden whose book *Re-Enchanting the Activist: Spirituality and Social Change* I've just been reading. The reason I've been reading it is that I, along with my congregation, – we are searching for ways to stretch ourselves 'spiritual-actively', that is to look at how to invite community in and how to collaborate with the community around us.

Finding joy in hard times

We are not alone in this of course because all of us are engaged in the work of re-enchanting activism, and re-enchanting theology while we are at it as well. Re-enchanting activism is actively sharing, celebrating and finding joy in what we do with and for others, even in hard times. I read the other day that the radical photographer Alan Sekula once said that unpredictable times call for unpredictable responses. Keith Hebden says that those unpredictable responses include losing and finding ourselves in the broken world around us, and then participating in it and 'conspiring' with it for the common good. For that we need each other – that's why we gather in congregation. And why we gather beyond congregation.

We are a congregational denomination and we value our independence. We also gather at festivals such as the Festival of Unitarians in the Southeast (FUSE) and at Summer School at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow to recharge in community beyond our own locale – because we need one another's skills, voices, creativity, love, experience and enchantment beyond congregation. We need to go out in order to return, to be nourished by difference in order to make a difference on our own communities.

In 2018 Ann Howell (former Director of SimpleGifts social action

Conor Kelly spoke on Localgiving and online fundraising.



centre at Bethnal Green) and I began a small project called 'Beyond Congregation'. Last June we held our first event 'Turning the Tables' and found there that people need and want to share and talk and plan and cook and laugh and hear from projects around the country. We held a second one later that year and in March, a third.

At each of these events we have been hosted by the Live Art Development Agency who are now based at the Garrett Centre, in the former Unitarian domestic mission in Mansford Street in Bethnal Green. As they get to know us, they voice their commitment to our shared values by offering support, and that means offering their space – which is warm and well served with technology and a good kitchen – to us for free. It is now our Beyond Congregation base.

Fundraising increasingly important

We found at our first two meetings that the most important thing was sharing. We had people coming from behind Unitarianism, and we began to think about ways in which we might learn from one another's projects and experiences. We also began to think about fundraising. Beyond Congregation received some funding from The Hibbert Trust, whose commitment to innovation and supporting new ventures is enormously important to the movement. For many of us, as ministers and as volunteers, fundraising for our community projects is a tough call and yet an increasingly important part of our roles. At Lewisham Unity we have crowdfunded online for our 'just-gardening' project and many of you supported us.

Through that project we realised that we were just dipping our toes into the world of ways to gather and share financial support for projects, and so last week we invited Conor Kelly, partnership and programme director from the London-based charity Localgiving – who themselves support small charities – to come and work with us for a morning to bring online fund-raising skills for small projects to the Beyond Congregation table.

Happy to share knowledge

We were a small group, which was lucky for us because it enabled us to go deep, and to learn a great deal about the ways that fundraising online can work for us. Not simply to gather funds, but also to enable us to hone and tell our stories, to gather community around us and to act as ambassadors for our mission. At Lewisham Unity we gather and give. We give money as a community to support our congregation. We support campaigns and charities which share and hold our values, and we invite them to talk to us about what they do. We recently gained our first arts grant to work with older people locally, focusing on the older LGBTQ+ community, with artists who are allied to our community as part of our shared common purpose of contributing to well-being, flourishing and nourishing.

We realise that we have to gather finance and funding in a variety of ways to survive as a congregation and we have to serve our local community and benefit local people as part of our mission and purpose. All of this means knowing how to raise funds. The follow up to the March workshop is that we can share the knowledge Conor brought to us. We would be happy to give talks and to share ideas and challenges. We would love to be able to pair projects and skills up – to create peer mentors for one another across the movement beyond congregation, knowing the variety of experiences and skills that are out there and in your communities. Please do get in touch.



Claire MacDonald

The Rev Dr Claire MacDonald is minister at Lewisham Unity, London. She is also thinker-in-residence at the Live Art Development Agency. Reach her via email at: justrevclaire@gmail.com